

Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, & Public Lands

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U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6207 - - (202) 226-7736

Witness Statement

TESTIMONY OF DON CLOWER, IDAHO FISH AND GAME COMMISSION
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
RESOURCES, NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

My name is Don Clower. I am a member of and am testifying on behalf of the Idaho Fish and Game Commission. I appreciate the opportunity to address this subcommittee in support of Congressman Simpson's bill regarding hunting on the recent expansion of the Craters of the Moon National Monument in Idaho.

The expansion of the Craters of the Moon National Monument was imposed by Presidential Proclamation on November 9, 2000. This expansion was significant, increasing the size of the monument nearly 10 fold to 661,000 acres with 410,000 acres to be managed by the National Park Service (NPS). The remaining 250,000 acres will be managed by the BLM.

The NPS administered portion of the expansion will be closed to hunting and trapping, in spite of language in the President's proclamation that states: "*Nothing in this proclamation shall be deemed to enlarge or diminish the jurisdiction of the State of Idaho with respect to fish and wildlife management.*" The rationale behind this decision to exclude hunting and trapping seems to be based on the practice that the NPS does not normally allow these activities on lands it administers unless there is legislation specifically allowing hunting and trapping. Hence the apparent need for Congressman Simpson's legislation. We urge you to support this legislation for the following reasons:

Hunting and trapping will not harm the resources the monument was established to protect. The monument was originally established and recently expanded to protect geologic formations. These activities will not have any impact on the lava flows or other geologic features of the monument that are any different than other uses of the monument like hiking, photography or sight seeing. Vehicles are restricted to existing roads and trails and apply to all users.

Hunting and trapping will not interfere with other uses of the monument. Seasons for both activities are relatively short and have limited participation. Hunting is confined to the months of September through November, which are outside the high visitation months of June, July and August while trapping is conducted from December through February. Under Congressman Simpson's proposed legislation these traditional activities would only be allowed on the expansion, the original monument with its parking areas and visitor center would remain closed to hunting.

Prohibiting hunting and trapping on the expansion is administratively impractical if not impossible. The expanded monument contains land managed by the NPS and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The NPS land includes the lava flows and the BLM land includes the sagebrush and grassland habitats surrounding the flows. The boundary between the land managed by the BLM, where hunting will continue to be allowed, and the NPS where hunting is prohibited is indistinct and is not readily discernable by the public. In order to post signs on the boundary it would have to be surveyed, at considerable expense. The resultant signing would be unsightly and defeat the purpose of protecting the scenic beauty of the area. Until signing is completed, public will not be able to tell if they are in the area open to hunting and trapping.

Prohibiting hunting on the expansion will have negative impacts to nearby farmland. The loss of hunting and expanded refuge created by the monument is likely to result in increases in elk numbers. In the last twenty years elk populations have increased dramatically on the sagebrush steppe lands surrounding the Monument and the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL). These animals spend the daylight hours where hunting is prohibited and depredate adjacent agricultural lands at night. Large refuges like the INEEL and the expanded Craters Monument make it very difficult to control the size of these elk herds. In addition, higher elk populations could alter the unique native plant communities found in the lava flows and smaller kipukas that the monument desires to protect. Prohibiting hunting and other wildlife management practices will inhibit our ability to manage big game populations at a level that is compatible with other resource uses and values. We suggest that the proposed legislation allow other wildlife management practices on the expansion, like trapping and aerial survey.

Prohibiting hunting will result in the loss of a unique and highly valued recreational opportunity. There is a common misconception that no hunting takes place on the lava flows. Hunters and trappers do use this area. Those willing to brave the remote and hostile terrain are rewarded with a truly unique recreational experience. Trapping should also be authorized in the legislation.

Allowing hunting on lands managed by the National Park Service will not set a precedent. In the past the IDFG has successfully advocated maintaining hunting opportunity in the designation of National Monuments in Idaho. When the Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument and the City of the Rocks National Reserve were designated both remained open to hunting. The IDFG has worked closely with the NPS and the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation to ensure hunting does not conflict with other uses of these lands. The Department is committed to continuing this relationship on the expanded Craters of the Moon National Monument.

The concerns I have outlined here today will come as no surprise to the NPS, the BLM and other Department of Interior (DOI) officials familiar with the proposal to expand the Craters of the Moon. We were disappointed in the lack of coordination by the DOI in the early phases of this proposal. We were not notified of or invited to participate in public meetings or interagency discussions on expansion of the Craters. In spite of this, the Commission made their concerns known in writing and in testimony prior to the President's proclamation, all to no avail. Our Governor, Dirk Kempthorne, has written Secretary Gail Norton on this issue and our legislature has passed a memorial regarding hunting in the Craters expansion area.

In closing Mr. Chairman, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission requests passage of this legislation because it makes sense. The rules regarding uses of National Monuments should be tailored to the resources the designation was designed to protect. Uses that do not conflict with the purpose of the designation should not only be allowed, they should be encouraged. Hunting and trapping are compatible with the expanded area of the Craters of the Moon National Monument. These activities have been going on there for years without harming the scenic beauty of this unearthly landscape. Let's keep it that way. I thank you for this opportunity to testify and for your favorable consideration of this request.

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